

STATE  
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA  
IOWA CITY, IOWA 52240



*The Program in Creative Writing  
Department of English*

March 6, 1966

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GRADUATE COLLEGE

Duane Spriestersbach, Dean  
The Graduate College

Dear Dean Spriestersbach:

I have the honor of  
frightening you with the enclosed proposals,  
made at your suggestion.

This is a crucial year  
for this Program. We have never had as many grad-  
uate students from as varied places, and not in  
many years as talented a group. Unlike most areas  
of the University, we are above all a graduate effort,  
our undergraduates being perhaps no more than twenty  
per cent of the total enrolled in writing. This  
means that we have a special problem with financing  
the best students. We also have a small percentage  
of students from Iowa, probably no more than ten  
per cent, if that. Thus, the question of out-of-  
state tuition suddenly becomes crucial, and espec-  
ially for our foreign students, who are absolutely  
superb, many of them established writers in their  
own countries. They add publications and an extension  
of our literary understanding.

A special circumstance in  
1966 is the plan for 6000 fellowships in the Human-  
ities from the Office of Education. This will rise  
to 7500 next year. Aside from my suspicion that  
there are not 500 really gifted graduate students in  
the Humanities (based on having been a graduate stud-  
ent in that area myself at three universities--Iowa,  
Columbia and Oxford), it looks to me as if from now on  
no Humanities graduate student of any substance worth  
supporting will be without a three-year appointment at  
a good figure (especially the ladies!). For whom, then,  
should our customary fellowships in English be intended?

It will be no shock to you to  
discover that I feel the talented writer should be con-  
sidered to have some priority. My reasons are as modest  
as I can make them.

1. There is no provision for  
the writing student in any of the government fellow-

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ships becoming available. I have no explanation for the past giving of NDEA fellowships to students of criticism, but not of writing.

2. The level of writing student we get is exceptionally high. We are a unique Program, whereas the conventional Departments are very much like those in other Universities. Each year we have applicants who are honors graduates of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale Princeton, Amherst and others. Honors graduates from those Universities seldom apply here for scholarly studies, since they can get fellowships to their own Universities, with much larger research facilities.

3. Our students publish. I have on my desk seven new books by recent graduates. Among poetry prizes of the year, three have been won by our people--the Lamont Award, the Harriet Monroe Prize from Poetry magazine, and a prize of the Poetry Society of America. The Lamont Award is the highest prize a young poet can win; of the last five awards, three have gone to Iowa Poetry Workshop students. If I were not so cautious in my speech, I would call that unsurpassed. The new anthology NEW CAMPUS WRITING, from all the campuses of the country, has five contributors from Iowa; the next closest university has two. Harvard has one poem, we have eight. Recent issues of Harper's, The New Yorker, Poetry and other magazines have poems by our students. We are now preparing a new anthology of poetry, fiction and criticism by Iowa writing students, some 500 pages, to be published in the coming winter. It will be called MIDLAND II.

4. Our foreign effort is large and growing. We have had people from Turkey, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, India, Pakistan, Poland, England, Ireland, Sweden, Nigeria, Tanzania, Canada. We are hoping to establish a large Latin American Program with the help of a Foundation set up by Rodman Rockefeller, to include a Chair at \$15,000 to be held by one of the eminent men of letters from Latin America and financed by the Foundation.

These people also publish. Our anthology of recent French poetry in translation was published last year and had a fine press. An anthology of recent Chinese verse in translation, by YIP Wai-lim from Hong Kong, now at Princeton, has been accepted by the University of Texas Press. An anthology of recent Korean poetry in translation, by KO Won, now at the Library of Congress, is almost fin-



ished and will certainly be published. Two volumes of translations from Japanese poetry are in process; a book of translations from Polish verse is under way and will be sustained in the coming year by a Polish writer whom I am bringing with private funds. An anthology of Bengali poetry since Tagore will be advanced in 1966-67 through three Bengali writers whom I am bringing here through private funds (Bengali is the language of Calcutta and is the great instrument of literature in India). I also plan an anthology of Latin American poetry. It is my expectation that a steady flow of translated works will issue in the coming years.

5. This year the Program has some 240 graduate students. Their tuition payments exceed the total cost of the Program by thousands of dollars. Yet the Program receives/\$3000 a /only year in Fellowships. Without the \$45,000 from private funds which I raise annually (the University's contribution is thus about 15% of the total, although this excludes some \$10,000 from other funds which I bring here), we would have few of our best students.

6. Current Fellowship criteria help entirely the Ph.D. candidate. Since few writing students proceed to that degree, this means we receive almost none. The MFA is the writer's degree, but the qualifications for Fellowships are such as to exclude our students who take that degree. We have five students with 4-point averages, but they receive no aid. Formerly, when Baldwin Maxwell was Head of the English Department, he and I selected the top candidates for graduate appointments, after consulting our staffs, and alternated them in recommendations to the Graduate College. In the past three years, that practise has stopped, thus leaving the writer outside the support of graduate funds. This is one reason why I have devoted so much time the past three years to raising money, which means not only a vast number of not really exciting hours at the typewriter trying to be persuasive at long range, but a great deal of time in travel as far away as New York and Washington as well a great many hours of conference with Foundation people, business executives, magazine editors and individuals of good will. This has been educational for me; I have learned a great deal about soliciting funds and I can estimate the temperament of the man at the desk by sensing the sort of carpet he has through the soles of my shoes (thin enough to transmit the sensation). If the Latin American project described ~~below~~ comes through, this will put my total over half a million; since I have always paid my own travel costs, this has come entirely /above



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without expense to the University. Has money ever been more cheaply raised?

6. As out-of-state tuition increases, and the Program receives no scholarships, I must divert an increasing amount of the painfully raised private funds to pay them, and thus take an equal amount away from private fellowships to bring students of talent here.

What might be done? Let me candidly state our needs, with the understanding that the beggar who can't get a whole loaf will often settle for a crumb; he can always hope it will be a nice big crumb.

One problem I have is that the fund-raising has so severely cut into my time that I have not published new work in a year. For 1965, I published three books; that is now the end. I don't have one page of a new one. This means a delay of at least 2-3 years before I can get back into print. The loss of publishing (and my agreement with the University when I came here was that I was to have not less than half of my time free to write) can be measured on an interesting scale--roughly, since I wrote at least 150 pages a year, every \$300 I have raised has cost me a page of a book.

Essentially, three things would be of tremendous help.

1. Since many of our students who receive private funds are engaged in translation-research, work at the Library (like Miss Grever, whom you so kindly helped), and other labors not creative, it would help if they could be called Research Assistants. Thus, I paid out-of-state tuition for the poet Ko Won, who worked all last year in the Library doing research on the writers he was translating and on the crucial problem of translating from a language of ideograms to one of letters. There are not less than 7-10 of these a year. Miss Nieh from Taiwan has been honored by being asked to do a volume on a modern Chinese writer in a new series; she will spend hours in the Library.

2. Tuition scholarships might be given at least to those people to whom we give private monies. It is a sad annual moment when, having spent the summer building up this account, I then turn over a considerable proportion of it to pay for tuition, not for living costs. Absurd as it sounds, 14-20 scholarships a year would make a vast improvement. This would still be only 12% of our enrollment.

3. Fellowships are indispensable for us to compete, as other Universities increasingly imitate us and draw students away. Thus, Stanford has a fellowship of \$3500 a year, and a good number of them. Oddly, writing students often prefer Iowa at less money,



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but not if the differential is too great. If this Program had to rely for its fellowship offerings only on the \$3000 we now receive from the Graduate College (and we are properly grateful for that), the Program would in a year descend to the average level of many Departments which have little money and less distinction (my colleagues will like that!). Would hope of \$10,000 more a year seem absurd? The conventional aspect of the English Department will receive more than that in Office of Education fellowship funds, and their level of applicant is far more ordinary than ours, since there is no great distinction between their offerings and those of standard Departments across the country.

One final comment. The easy thing for me to do would be what so many of my colleagues do--sit back and let what students can arrive on their own power come here. It is possibly an error to have the ambition which compels me to the endless extra steps I take--to turn Iowa City into the only international center for the young writer in the world. It is that to some extent now. Once the Latin American plan is financed, and I manage to persuade the Volkswagen Foundation to bring German writers, and Olivetti Italians, the Kennedy Fund the Irish, International Latex the French (it has a Franco-ophile as President), and enlist Eastern European ministries of Culture, this will be a reality. Yet is it worth doing? I sacrifice my books to it. Should I, within ten years of retirement, especially when I see my colleagues refusing to give time to such enterprises, preferring to publish their own books, often at a profit of many thousands of dollars?

What, really, I am asking might be thought of as a small return of the substantial funds which I bring each year to this University and its Graduate College.

Enclosed are a couple items you may have missed. I mail this rather than send through University mails because it is Sunday and I don't want to have one day's delay in getting this to you, as I leave in two weeks.

With much appreciation for your interest, time and willingness to consider my problems,

*Paul Engle*  
Paul Engle

Did you ever see the poetry film?